

h czzcuivulv wx

Diary of A Crisis Bjt, 430 Three Takes, 1,260

By GAYLORD SHAW

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON AP - From his bedroom in the middle of the night, President Nixon ordered the word flashed to U.S. military units around the world: Go to DefCon-3.

With its cryptic militaryese, the message placed the men and machines of war on alert early Thursday, flexing America's military muscle in the tense arena of global politics where miscalculation carries the danger of thermonuclear destruction.

Presidential aides say Nixon ordered the nation's armed forces to "Defense Condition Three" - a general military alert - after receiving "solid, substantial evidence" that the Soviet Union was considering introducing troops in the war-torn Middle East.

Later, some critics would wonder aloud whether Nixon overreacted, perhaps influenced by a desire to take the nation's mind off his Watergate-related woes at home.

But a reconstruction of the 24 hours beginning at 4 p.m. Wednesday show that Nixon and his advisers treated the crisis as a real one.

From administration officials, as well as other official and unofficial sources, comes an account with elements worthy of a Fletcher Knebel novel - black limousines speeding through deserted streets to a crowded situation room; early morning telephone calls to the President's bedroom, and coded messages flowing from the labyrinth of the Pentagon.

A diary of the crisis:

It began late in the afternoon on a crisp, sunny autumn day when Soviet Ambassador Anatoly F. Dobrynin arrived at Henry A. Kissinger's seventh-floor suite at the State Department.

The ambassador, a tall, smiling man with rimless spectacles, stayed for more than an hour. Precisely what he discussed with the secretary of state is still shrouded by secrecy, but he apparently relayed word that the Kremlin strongly supported an Egyptian appeal that the Soviet Union and United States send troops to the Middle East to supervise the cease-fire agreement they had inspired.

The United States opposed the idea.

Dobrynin left, but a few hours later his limousine was spotted in the State Department's basement parking garage. It was being used by a lower-level Soviet embassy official to deliver a formal message from Moscow.

Contents of the message, addressed to the President, but handed to Kissinger, haven't been officially released, but Sen. Henry M. Jackson, D-Wash., told newsmen it warned "in brutal terminology" that the Soviet Union would act alone if necessary to police the cease-fire between Israel and her Arab enemies.

Sen. J.W. Fulbright, D-Ark., disagreed with Jackson's description. The message, he said, may have been couched in urgent terms "but from what I know it was not threatening."

MORE

Jg44Caed oct 26

a045

h czzcuivwyyf wx

WASHINGTON Take 2 Diary of A Crisis Bjt a044wx: threatening. 440
 Whatever its wording, the message from Moscow thickened the air of crisis.

Kissinger made another in his steady series of telephone calls to the President, placed a call to Israeli Ambassador Simcha Dinitz, summoned his top advisers and sent a series of cables to key embassies in the troubled area.

About six hours after Dobrynin strode into his office, Kissinger left the State Department and headed for the White House.

Other limousines hurried through the quiet streets of the capital, carrying high level defense and intelligence officials to the White House.

At his news conference Thursday, Kissinger said the President "at a special meeting of the National Security Council last night, at 3 a.m.," ordered that "certain precautionary measures" be taken.

Sources said that during a four-hour period beginning about 10 p.m., there were a series of meetings in the White House West Wing between Kissinger and officials of the State and Defense departments and Central Intelligence Agency.

Kissinger was in constant telephone contact with Nixon. Finally, after he and other senior officials had unanimously agreed on recommendations for action, he again telephoned the President.

According to sources, Nixon had by then retired to his bedroom. It was from his bedroom, the sources said, that the President gave the official order for the alert.

The word was quickly dispatched to the National Military Command Center. From there it flashed to units at home and abroad: Go to DefCon-3.

DefCon-3 did not put the military on a war footing. It primarily meant leaves were canceled, men were ordered to return to their units and preparations were made to move them out if necessary.

It did have some dramatic aspects.

In Florida, highway patrolmen were told not to halt cars speeding airmen from their residences to Homestead Air Force Base.

Across the Atlantic, the aircraft carrier John F. Kennedy was instructed to steam into the Mediterranean.

In Europe, U.S. troops stationed in West Germany took up positions along the so-called Fulda Gap, an ancient invasion route from Eastern Europe.

As the military responded to the alert, a weary Kissinger managed to get a few hours sleep.

Nixon was up earlier than usual, arriving at his Oval Office before dawn. There, over coffee, he conferred with Kissinger before going to the Cabinet Room where 14 congressional leaders had gathered for a briefing.

MORE

jg448aed oct 26

h czzcuivvyyx wx

WASHINGTON Take 3 Diary of A Crisis Bjt ac44-045wx: briefing. 390
Seventy minutes later, the grim-faced congressmen filed out through the West Portico of the White House. Newsmen - many of them awakened at 5 a.m. with news of the alert - were waiting to fire a volley of questions.

It was, House Speaker Carl Albert responded, "only a precautionary alert . . . the emphasis is on diplomacy at this time."

As Nixon and Kissinger returned to the Oval Office to review the continuing exchange of messages with Moscow and other capitals, Deputy Press Secretary Gerald L. Warren was told to stress to reporters that the alert was merely precautionary. But he wouldn't respond when asked why precautions were necessary.

It was decided Kissinger should go through with a news conference that had been scheduled before the crisis flared. And it was decided that Nixon should make a public appearance.

As reporters and photographers watched, Nixon and Kissinger stepped from the West Portico and strolled up the driveway to the secretary's waiting limousine.

Then, Nixon sprinted up the steep flight of stairs to his suite in the Executive Office Building. His rapid pace was in marked contrast to a scene on Monday when the President climbed the same stairs at slow, almost ponderous pace.

On Monday, Nixon was heading to his hideaway suite to contemplate ways to cope with the crisis he triggered with the weekend firing of special Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox.

On Thursday, Nixon was heading to his hideaway suite to contemplate ways to cope with an international crisis - a crisis he clearly felt more comfortable with.

Four hours later, just as Nixon sought, the United Nations Security Council voted unanimously to dispatch a peacekeeping force to the Mideast - minus any forces from the Soviet Union or United States.

The President and his Secretary of State could relax a bit. Almost precisely 44 hours after the Soviet ambassador had arrived at the State Department, Nixon and Kissinger stepped from the Oval Office onto the South Lawn.

There, as the afternoon sun slanted through towering trees turned orange and gold with autumn, they walked in quiet conversation about the day they moved almost to the brink and back.

Jg455aed oct 26